

ADDRESS

BY

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BISHOP OF PENNSYLVANIA

AT THE

MEMORIAL SERVICE

FOR THE

MEN AND WOMEN OF GREAT BRITAIN
WHO GAVE THEIR LIVES IN
THE GREAT WAR

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HOLY TRINITY CHURCH
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Our Debt to Britain.

I was brought up to love England and to believe that I should be no worse an American for that. Later on, three years of student life in Oxford made my love of England not merely a cherished family tradition, but a deep and strong personal experience. When the War broke out I was in England, through the tense moments of the retreat from Mons, followed by the definite and, as it is now seen to have been, the decisive defeat of the Germans at the First Battle of the Marne. In that October I came home, leaving much of my heart and soul behind me, chiefly resolved to do my part in bringing my country out on England's side without delay or reservation. I argued that if in 1776 it would have been treason for an American to be neutral in America's quarrel against England, so in 1914 it was no less treasonable for an American to be neutral in England's quarrel against Germany. In each case the issue was identical; *then*, for our own liberty; *now*, for the whole world's. Thank God, in the end, and before it was too late, the logic of that argument caught up a hundred millions of Americans almost as a single man.

So far I have been personal. For the rest I would be quite impersonal. Not as an ardent friend, but, so far as I may, as an impartial judge, I would speak of what we owe to England.

We have a much more serious and solemn thing to do than to pay England compliments. We have to bind ourselves to England, soul to soul, in an unshakable alliance for the peace and freedom of the world. And for that end warmth of emotion is a poor substitute for calmness of thought and clearness of conviction. When the story of the War comes to be written, and a measured judgment gained, there is no doubt, I think, that the supreme place in the winning of the Victory will be on all hands freely given to England and the British Empire and for three chief reasons:

First, for her fleet, not the Grand Fleet alone, but all the host of ships of every type and size, in every kind of work. It would not be an overstatement to call the British Fleet the first principle of the whole Allied campaign; the primary assumption upon which our successful argument with Germany entirely depended. One can speak here only in general terms. But the most careful study of the minutest operations of the British Navy, while it would stir the blood and thrill the heart to an almost painful point, would only corroborate in detail what is really patent at a glance: namely, that, in the last analysis, the rock on which the brutal ambitions of the Central Powers split and went to pieces was British Sea Power, meaning by British Sea Power not simply guns and tonnage, but art and science, and,

above all, inheritance, tradition and morale. Each Allied navy played its part, and played it worthily. And there was need of each for the doing of the work. But the British Navy gave to each one of the Allied Fleets its opportunity, held the field till each came in, kept the way open, and so made possible that freedom of the seas in which once more the world rejoices.

An Irishman is said to have refused to volunteer for service in the War because England had never done a thing for him. He had no reason to be loyal. "But," he was asked, "suppose the Germans come and burn and plunder and destroy? What then?" "O, but they won't; they can't," he answered. "And why not? What's to prevent?" "Why, man, the English Fleet; they'll never get by that!" It would be hard to find a better and more convincing tribute to the silent, majestic, almost elemental power of the British Navy. We take it, the whole world takes it, so much for granted, we count on it with such absolute security, that we forget it's there!

Secondly, because of the range of British operations quite unparalleled in history. Not only in France and Belgium, but in Palestine and Syria (and how can any single Christian forbear a special tribute of gratitude and admiration for that adventurous, valorous, skillful and complete campaign by which the Holy Land was freed and the Crusaders vindicated?)—in Africa and Egypt, in India, and Italy, and Macedonia, great and memorable things were done.

At the beginning of the War men's hearts were stirred by the spectacle of the whole British Empire pouring out its men and money and material, from the very ends of the earth, in the great cause of freedom. First, this tide of British Imperial power flowed in to the points of concentration. Then it flowed out again to the attack, on what was well nigh a world front in a world war, for a world peace.

Never can we fail in paying full tribute to the brilliant gallantry of France, to the dauntless spirit of the Belgians, to the undismayed and undiscouraged arms of Italy, and, dearest of all, to the magnificent courage and temper of our own men. All did their part and all were greatly needed. Each Allied force had its task and opportunity. Each seized it and fulfilled it. So, and so only, could Victory be won.

But on Britain was laid a unique and world-wide responsibility and obligation in East and West and North and South. Everywhere she lived up to it and saw it through.

Thirdly, because of the British spirit of grim, dogged, unbreakable persistence; never so much needed, never so sorely tested, never so finely shown as in this War.

One may not compare spiritual qualities and rank one higher than the rest. God gives special gifts to the races and

families of men. And the glory of His Kingdom is found in the totality of all the different gifts which all the different nations shall bring into it.

The power of indomitable adherence to a task till it is finished, without a thought or desire of recognition, with an apparent dislike of praise and demonstration, may not be the highest of God's spiritual gifts to men, but it is a power always needed and sometimes supremely necessary. And in this War it was to turn the scale. The actual development of the main conflict on the Western Front, the unexpected and almost intolerable strain of living and fighting in the trenches, the absolute necessity of holding on indefinitely at every point on sea and land till the enemy gave way: that was the point of most critical importance, that was the major premise of the final Victory. And here Great Britain gave what was needed. This spirit in the British is proverbial. All British history is full of it. The story of the age-long discipline by which this spirit has been sustained and perfected can now be read in a new light. It is seen to be the story of a preparation for a final test, for a final crisis which should determine the world's spiritual destiny. This War was a War against War: against War just at the moment of War's supremest pomp and pride and power. The Victory could not be won short of so crushing a defeat as would annihilate the War spirit, please God forever, among men. The dogged, determined, unbeatable, almost unthinkable persistence of the British armies, yes, of the British nation and of the British Empire, proved the sure foundation on which the Allies could depend for their common and united triumph.

These, then, I would suggest as the three achievements of Great Britain, which measure roughly the thanks and gratitude so justly due her and which have given her, in the Providence of God, the leadership in our common conflict and our common victory: Her fleet, her far-flung range of operations, her indomitable spirit. These are her gifts given to the world, given willingly and splendidly, but given at a fearful cost. Our appreciation of that cost is what brings us here today. In a true sense our Victory is a gift given to us by the dead even more than by the living. For the dead gave their all to give it to us. And the fact that they have died to give it makes their gift so wonderful and overwhelmingly a gift of life, to life, for life.

Let our last thought be our best and highest thought: that, by the grace of God, nothing for which these our brethren died shall fail of full accomplishment; that their willing sacrifice for us shall be a gladly accepted obligation; that the blood which they so freely shed for us shall be the bond of a new and enduring relation, in the strength of which we shall go on together to finish the work so well begun, to the glory of God and the increase of His Kingdom.